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AUTHOR Finck, John
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ABSTRACT

This document reports on the resettlement of Hmong refugees in Providence, Rhode Island: what their employment experiences have been, which resettlement efforts have been successful, and how current resettlement efforts could be altered to improve the Hmong's long-term adjustment. The report is part of a larger, national project on Hmong resettlement. Section I gives general information about the area, the population, the economic base and employment opportunities, welfare, housing, refugee services, and a mixed community reaction to the Hmong. Section II gives a brief summary of the size and history of the Hmong population in Providence, which was estimated at approximately 1,700-2,000 in 1983. Section III discusses the issues of employment, job training, education, and adult English-as-a-second-language programs. In section IV summaries of the site specific findings are given, along with reflections on the future of the Hmong in Providence. Some of these findings are as follows: (1) housing is inexpensive either for rental or purchase; (2) there are a large number of entry level jobs in the jewelry and metal industries which, while low paying, give the Hmong jobs and often provide health insurance benefits; (3) the Hmong community is recognized and funding is available for them throughout the state; (4) employers are increasingly receptive to refugees; (5) health centers with bilingual staff are available; (6) there is an undercurrent of racial tension, and segregated housing patterns limit the Hmong to high crime neighborhoods. In general, the outlook for the Hmong in Providence is seen as relatively positive with the expectation that they will reduce their welfare dependency rate below the average for United States' citizens. (CG)

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THE HMONG RESETTLEMENT STUDY

SITE REPORT:

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

July 1984

Prepared for:

Office of Refugee Resettlement
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, S.W., Room 1229
Switzer Building
Washington, DC 20201

Ms. Toyo Biddle, Government Project Officer

Contract #HHS 600-82-0251

Submitted by:

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Literacy & Language Program
300 S.W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204

Stephen Reder, Project Director

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THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED BY:

John Finck

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PREFACE

The Hmong Resettlement Study is a national project funded by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. The study is the joint undertaking of Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Portland, Oregon), the University of Minnesota and Lao Family Community (Santa Ana, California). The major purposes of the Study are to examine closely the resettlement of Hmong refugees in the United States, focusing on the following issues:

What has been the resettlement experience of the Hmong?

- How are the Hmong faring in terms of employment, dependence, and adjustment?
- Are there areas of employment in which the Hmong have been particularly successful?
- What do resettlement workers and the Hmong regard as the major impediments to effective Hmong resettlement and self-sufficiency?
- What role does secondary migration play in the resettlement of the Hmong? What are the reasons for secondary migration among this group? What are the implications for resettlement strategies?

What resettlement efforts and economic strategies have provided effective results for the Hmong?

- How are problems being handled? What kinds of solutions are being tried, by different resettlement communities and by the Hmong themselves?
- How many and what kinds of entrepreneurial economic development projects involving the Hmong are currently in operation, e.g., farming projects, Pa ndau cooperatives? How were they developed and how successful are they?
- What kinds of Hmong employment strategies have been particularly successful?

How might current strategies be changed to result in more effective resettlement and long-term adjustment of the Hmong?

- How might resettlement be conducted differently for the Hmong? What new projects and approaches are being considered by those involved in Hmong resettlement? How would the Hmong want resettlement to be done differently?

- How can the Hmong be resettled in a way that better utilizes their strengths and unique characteristics?

- What do the Hmong want for themselves? What do Hmong view as essential for effective resettlement? What are their goals for the future? For the next generation of Hmong?

Research conducted in the project included analysis of existing data about the Hmong, compilation of information gathered through numerous informal face-to-face and telephone conversations with Hmong informants across the country (in nearly every Hmong settlement which could be identified) and on-site observations, group meetings and personal interviews with Hmong individuals and families (as well as resettlement officials, service providers and members of the host communities). On-site case studies of Hmong resettlement were conducted in seven selected cities:

Orange County, California
Fresno, California
Portland, Oregon
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas
Fort Smith, Arkansas
Providence, Rhode Island

Staff from the participating institutions worked as a team to conduct the overall project and the seven case studies:

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Stephen Reder, Project Director
Mary Cohn
John Finck (also with State of Rhode Island)
Michael Sweeney (also with Portland Public Schools)
Bruce Thowpaou Bliatout (also with City of Portland)
Karen Reed Green
William Hadley
Marshall Hurlich (also with University of Washington)
Dan X. Mua (also with Portland Public Schools)

University of Minnesota

Bruce Downing, Subproject Director
Simon Fass
Doug Olney
Sarah Mason
Glenn Hendricks

Lao Family Community

Shur Vang Vangyi, Subproject Director
Dang Vang
Thongsay Vang

The Project Officer for the Office of Refugee Resettlement was Ms. Toyo Biddle.

The results of the project are available to the public as a series of reports published by the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO). Copies may be ordered from:

Dr. Allan Gall
Office of Refugee Resettlement
330 C Street, S.W.
Switzer Building, Room 1229
Washington, D.C. 20201

or

Mr. Bud Tumy
Refugee Materials Center
U.S. Dept. of Education
324 E 11th Street, 9th floor
Kansas City, Missouri 64104

Reports

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Vol. 2: Economic Development
Vol. 3: Exemplary Projects
Executive Summary (written in English)
Executive Summary (written in Lao)
Executive Summary (written in Hmong)

Site Reports: Orange County, California
Fresno, California
Portland, Oregon
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas
Fort Smith, Arkansas
Providence, Rhode Island

For further information about the Hmong Resettlement Study, contact either:

Dr. Stephen Reder
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
300 S.W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204
(503) 248-6800

Dr. Bruce Downing
SARS
124 Klaeber Court
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
(612) 376-3486

Ms. Toyo Biddle
Office of Refugee Resettlement
330 "C" Street, SW
Switzer Building, Room 1229
Washington, DC 20201
(202) 245-1966

Details of Fieldwork Conducted in Providence, Rhode Island

Fieldwork was conducted in March 1983 by John Finck and Doug Olney. Mr. Finck was a consultant to the Rhode Island Office of Refugee Resettlement. Mr. Olney is a staff member of the Southeast Refugee Studies Program at the University of Minnesota.

Interviews were conducted with refugee leaders, voluntary agency staff, ESL teachers, employment counselors, employers, and religious leaders. Three group meetings were held with members of the Hmong community to sample opinions and by a showing of hands to gauge views and attitudes on resettlement issues. Bilingual Hmong college students were hired to translate for interviews with non-English speaking individuals. Interviews within the Hmong community were conducted with clan leaders, heads of household, widows, elders, women, college and high school students.

A draft of the case study was completed on June 3, 1983, and widely circulated for comments. The draft was revised on August 3, 1983. The second draft was revised on December 1, 1983. The final draft was revised in July 1984.

Without the help of many people--readers, critics and sources--this report could not have been written or even attempted. The following people, in particular, made significant contributions:

Mr. Douglas Olney, a colleague in the Hmong Resettlement Study from the University of Minnesota, participated in all aspects of the fieldwork in Providence. Mr. Olney conducted and wrote up approximately one-half of the field interviews, conducted in March 1983. Dr. Yang Dao, also from the University of Minnesota, participated in the initial meetings with the Hmong community.

The Board of Directors and the President of the Hmong-Lao Unity Association of Rhode Island, Inc., Mr. Teng Yang, made it possible for the fieldwork to be conducted in their community. Mr. Xia Xeu Kue, Mr. Vang Seng Khang, and Mr. Ger Xiong also welcomed us into their groups. Mr. Koua Khang served as principal interpreter for the duration of the fieldwork. Valuable cross-cultural methodological suggestions were provided by Mr. Doua Yang, Mr. Tia Kha and Mr. Xoua Thao.

Earlier versions of the report were carefully read by Dr. Marshall Hurlich of the University of Washington; Ms. Toyo Biddle, Project Officer from the Office of Refugee Resettlement; Mr. Cleo Lachapelle, State Coordinator of the Rhode Island Office of Refugee Resettlement; Ms. Louisa Schein of the University of California at Berkeley; Fr. Bill Taugway of St. Michael's Church, Providence; Ms. Donna Dryer, Brown University; Mr. Douglas Olney and, of course, the Board and staff of the Hmong Lao Unity Association.

The author is solely responsible for the contents and interpretations found in this report.

I

GENERAL CONTEXT

Setting and Climate and General Population

Providence, the capital of the second most densely populated state in the nation, dominates the tiny coastal state, whose greatest width of 37 miles is only exceeded by its great length of 48 miles. Rhode Island's mean annual temperature is 50 degrees F. January is the coldest month with an average temperature of 28 degrees F.; July is the warmest with an average temperature of 72 degrees F. On the average, 42 inches of rain falls each year.

As late as 1920, Providence was one of the 20 largest cities in the nation. Its population peaked that year with 267,918 people. By 1970 the population had dropped to 179,116 and by 1980 it was down to 156,804. Between 1950 and 1970, Providence had the highest rate of population decline of any major city in the nation.

Rhode Island is an immigrant state. The largest ethnic group in Providence is the Irish, followed by the Italians. Other significant ethnic groups include the French-Canadians, Portuguese, Poles, Germans, Armenians, Scandinavians and Russian Jews.

Other Minority Groups

Blacks are the largest minority group in Providence and live in the same neighborhoods as the Hmong. About 18,500 (or 12%) of Providence's 156,000 residents are Black. Another 9,000 (6%) of the city is Hispanic, including subcommunities of Dominicans, Colombians, Puerto Ricans, Cape Verde Islanders and Guatemalans, also living in the same neighborhood as the Hmong.

Although the Portuguese do not consider themselves a minority people, they are the largest group of non-English speaking people in the state. Approximately 13%-14% of Rhode Island's population is of Portuguese extraction.

According to the 1980 Census, 9,894 Asians lived in Providence, which comprised 6.3% of the city's population.

By 1983, the Southeast Asian population in Providence was estimated by the state refugee coordinator's office as:

Cambodian	2,800
Hmong	1,750-2,000
Lao	500
Vietnamese	100

1980 Asian Population For
Rhode Island and Providence

	Rhode Island	Providence
Chinese	1,718	804
Filipino	1,218	243
Asian Indian	851	150
Korean	592	150
Japanese	474	171
Vietnamese	314	118
Hawaiian	71	24
Guamanian	51	24
Eskimo	14	4
Somalian	14	4
Aleut	12	4
	5,329	1,698
Other Asians	14,677	8,196
Total Asian Population	20,006	9,894

Source: 1980 Census

Economic Base and Employment

Eighty years ago Providence was a leading textile city. It led the nation in the production of worsteds and was among the top five states in the manufacture of cotton goods. Since the turn of the century, the textile industry has been in decline. From 1929 onward, Rhode Island has consistently had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. Although the state's population increased by 17% from 1950 to 1970, manufacturing jobs in that period decreased from 125,000 to 109,000 and all jobs from 250,000 to 233,900. No new industry has taken up the slack left by the departing textiles.

The jewelry industry dominates what is left of the manufacturing sector. Employing at times up to 30,000 people, jewelry is the state's largest single industrial force, with 21% of the total manufacturing employment in 1982. Some workers are mold makers, senior platers and toolmakers with solid wages and benefits comparable to other union trades. But for the majority, the jewelry work means seasonal layoffs, little job security and exposure to hazardous working conditions. The state had 1,125 jewelry firms in 1982 and is the leading producer of costume jewelry in the country.

The other remnant of the manufacturing sector is the metal and machine industry. This sector includes iron and steel foundaries, forges, and smelting plants that make pipe, hardware, fasteners, screws, nails and other metal products.

The majority of new jobs have been created by modest growth in service jobs, in state and federal government, in health services and in education.

In January 1983, the unemployment rate in Rhode Island was 12.2%, the highest of any state in New England. In neighboring Connecticut, the

unemployment rate was 8.3%; in Massachusetts, 8.7%. Rhode Island's unemployment rate consistently stays about 3 percentage points above the rest of New England. Factory workers in Rhode Island are among the lowest paid in the nation. The state's average hourly wage of $6.68 in 1982 was the third lowest in the United States; only Mississippi and North Carolina had lower average factory wages. Not only are wages lower in Rhode Island, but they are growing at a slower rate than manufacturing wages nationally or even in New England. Between 1970 and 1982, the Rhode Island manufacturing wage increased 2.5%. By comparison, U.S. wages rose by 11.7% during the same period. Even in New England, wages increased by 7.7%, a three-fold leap over Rhode Island's.

Welfare Benefits and Regulations

Rhode Island has a general public assistance program for individuals and families with benefits comparable to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. For example, the AFDC standard in Rhode Island permits a family of four to receive $520.00 per month in the winter. The same family, on the GPA program, would receive $487.00. The state-financed GPA program includes medical coverage. Single people and childless couples, as well as families, can receive GPA.

If a person is employed but earns less than the GPA standard of need for the family's size, he or she may also collect GPA. If a person earns too much to qualify, he or she may still meet the standard for acceptance into the GPA medically-needy-only program.

Able-bodied heads of household who are unable to find work are required by state law to report to workfare. In exchange for working for the city full-time, the workfare participant "earns" his GPA benefits plus $40 a week.

Low-Income Housing

There is very little public housing in Providence. This is due, in part, to the availability of cheaply priced rentals in the private market. None of the Hmong live in public housing; few have applied.

Refugee Services Available

A full range of refugee services is available to the Southeast Asians in Providence, including English language instruction and job placement services. The Providence school department has hired over 30 bilingual teacher aides. Southeast Asian staff are found at the welfare office, the local neighborhood health centers and at three of the city's four major general hospitals. Each of the four Southeast Asian communities has a mutual assistance association which is supported in part by contracts from the state resettlement program.

Community Receptiveness to the Refugees

The community reception to the Southeast Asians in Providence ranges from indifference to neutrality to enthusiasm. Providence is an ethnically segregated city; the Southeast Asians are often seen as the latest group to land in the working class neighborhoods, where other immigrant and refugee groups began. Residents in contact with the Hmong view them as hard-working, law-abiding, family-centered people.

There is tension between the Southeast Asians and Blacks who live in the same relatively high crime neighborhoods. Crime is a topic of constant concern among the refugees. It is impossible to determine to what extent the crime inflicted on the Southeast Asians is racially motivated or a consequence of geography.

The city's only newspaper consistently runs favorable articles, editorials and photographs about the Southeast Asians. An hour-long independent documentary film on the Hmong community was aired recently on local television stations.

II

LOCAL HMONG POPULATION

Size

In 1983 the Hmong community in Providence is estimated to be between 1,700 and 2,000 persons by both Hmong community leaders and the State Office of Refugee Resettlement. A household census is currently being conducted by the Hmong MAA which estimates 252 families live in Providence as of June 1983.

Table 1

ESTIMATE OF HMONG FAMILIES IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND
(as of June 1983)

Yang	74
Khang	42
Kue	30
Moua	25
Xiong	23
Vang	22
Vue	14
Chue	8
Hang	5
Lee	4
Thao	3
Chang	2
Total Families	252

Source: Hmong-Lao Unity Association

The Hmong in Providence live close to each other, in two adjoining working-class neighborhoods known as West End and Elmwood. No family lives farther than a mile; most live less than half a mile. The vast majority live in double or triple decker Victorian homes. Members of an extended family often rent different floors of the same rambling house. Most homes are structurally sound but need cosmetic repairs. According to preliminary data from the Hmong Household Census, the average rent is $150 for a 5-6 room apartment, not including utilities. About 53 families have purchased their own homes according to a survey done by the Hmong-Lao Unity Association in 1984. The average family size is 6 persons per household, with a range between 2-13, according to the group meetings.

History of Resettlement

The Hmong who came directly to Providence were sponsored by two agencies, the International Institute, an affiliate of American Council for Nationalities Service, and the Catholic Social Service, an affiliate of the U.S. Catholic Conference. The so-called congregational model of resettlement, where an individual church or American family sponsors one or more refugee families, was not used in Rhode Island.

By chance a few key leaders were settled in Providence back in 1976. They sent word to their relatives in Thailand--join me in Providence, no matter where you are sent. About 30 families formed the nucleus of the Hmong community at the end of their first year in Providence. These initial arrivals were followed by five consecutive years of additional Hmong families arriving in Providence. (Please refer to the accompanying chart for year by year estimates.) About 60% of the population increase is attributed to direct arrivals sponsored by voluntary agencies in Rhode Island. All the rest--about

40% of the entire Hmong population in Rhode Island--came via secondary migration, according to studies by the Refugee Service Unit of the Rhode Island Department of Social and Rehabilative Services.

The Hmong population peaked in 1981. Estimates vary of its size. The average estimate falls in the range of 2,100 persons but some Hmong leaders and resettlement workers believe the population reached 2,500.

Prior to 1982 in-migration from other states to Rhode Island always exceeded the out-migrations. In 1982 this pattern reversed. For the first time out-migrations surpassed the combined totals of the new arrivals and the incoming secondary migrations. The accompanying chart shows that in 1982, 238 Hmong moved to Rhode Island while 280 Hmong moved out of state. California was the leading destination for the Hmong who left Rhode Island.

In November 1982 the American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service declared that Providence was one of the areas of the nation "heavily impacted" by the high concentration of refugees. As a result, Providence has been declared off-limits for new arrivals from Asia without immediate family already living in the state. This action has contributed to the reduced flow of new arrivals to the state at a time when Hmong in general have not been coming to the United States in any significant numbers since mid-1983. See Table 2 on the following page. The out-migration of Hmong exceeded in-migration in 1982 for the first time in the 1976-1982 resettlement history of Hmong in Providence. Tables 3 and 4 show the in- and out-migration of the Hmong in 1982.

Table 2

POPULATION ESTIMATES OF HMONG COMMUNITY IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

	Estimated Net Loss or Gain of Families	Estimated Number of Families	Estimated Hmong Population, + 250[1]
1976	+30	30	210
1977	+40	70	490
1978	+50	90	630
1979	+75	165	1,225
1980	+75	240	1,750
1981	+50	290	2,100
1982	-20	280	2,000
1983	-30	250	1,760
1984[2]		230	1,600

Source: Averaged Best Estimates of three Hmong Leaders

[1]The estimated number of families in any given year does not correspond on a consistent proportional basis to the population estimates for the community as whole because of differences in family size.

[2]As of June, 1984.

Table 3

1982 ADDITIONS TO RHODE ISLAND HMONG POPULATION

Initial Placements Directly from Thailand	Secondary Migration
135 people (52 families)	103 people (23 families) From: Alabama, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, St. Paul and Kansas City

Total = 238 people (75 families)

Table 4

1982 HMONG OUT-MIGRATION FROM RHODE ISLAND

Destination	Number of Families	Number of People
California	26	132
Ohio	9	57
Georgia	5	34
Massachusetts	4	24
Wisconsin	2	10
Minnesota	2	9
Illinois	1	3
Pennsylvania	1	1
Colorado	1	3
Tennessee	1	7
TOTALS	52	280

Net Loss: 42 Persons

Source: Hmong-Lao Unity Association

In 1984 the State Office of Refugee Resettlement estimates that 1 out of every 26 residents in Providence is Southeast Asian. Other refugee groups in Providence include these estimates:

2,800 Cambodians
500 Laotians
100 Vietnamese
500 Russian Jews

III

RESETTLEMENT ISSUES

Employment

Estimates by leaders and resettlement workers in 1983 place the average employment figure at 75% of employable Hmong adults. About 40% of the Hmong earn less than $4 an hour; 55% earn between $4 and $6 an hour and 5% earn $6 or more an hour. The average pay is about $4.50/hour. Most of those working full-time have health insurance. More women are working than men. About half the households have two or more people working, usually the husband and wife.

In a group meeting of 35 heads of household, only one man had never worked in the United States. In the same group, 18 had full-time jobs; 2 worked part-time and attended school; 6 were on workfare; 8 had been laid off and were looking for work; one man had both a full-time and part-time job; and 10 had at least one additional wage earner in the family. About half of the Hmong in Providence, according to the group meetings, got their jobs through the employment agency under contract to the resettlement program; the rest got theirs through relatives or by themselves.

The majority of Hmong interviewed said that it was essential for the wife to work if the family was to stay off welfare. Even with two wage earners, a large family barely stays ahead of the bills.

The majority of Hmong are employed in the jewelry, metal fabricating, and machine shop industries as assemblers, packers, polishers, grinders, inspectors and in other production type jobs. A few work as supervisors, draftsmen, insurance salesmen, or teacher aides.

The ability to speak English is not a prerequisite for entry-level jobs in Rhode Island, employers report. Willingness to work is a more important qualification. For any position other than entry level, however, English is the leading requirement. Job promotion, and with it seniority and protection from lay-offs, are directly related to English ability. English is the key to advancement and job security. Without continuing efforts to improve their written and spoken English the Hmong will not advance beyond their initial entry into the labor force as assembly workers.

Employers note that the Hmong bring strong loyalty to their jobs. In an interview with the Gorham Silver Company newspaper a Hmong said that he was happy at the firm and planned to work there for the rest of his life. Hmong leaders say that their people do not understand lay-offs and regard them as a statement by the company of poor work performance. Leaders say they would like to explain the American business cycle to their community. A leading question Hmong ask is why are there so few permanent jobs in America. In Laos a job was assumed to be forever. In America Hmong are reluctant to take temporary jobs even with the knowledge that they may lead to a permanent position later on.

The majority of Hmong currently work at entry-level jobs in such industries as jewelry which traditionally pay below the average wage. To a certain extent, many Hmong are locked into permanent low wage positions. Few companies with large numbers of entry level Hmong employees have any burning desire to train or upgrade the quality of their workforce. Although many of the jobs performed by the Hmong are repetitive, tedious or monotonous, few complain about their jobs, except to say their job was "too heavy for me" or "it makes me very very tired." A few said their jobs were just "okay." Some employers have seen a reluctance on the part of Hmong employees to bid for a

new job in the plant because of a desire not to leave their friends or relatives they work with.

What accounts for the relative success the Hmong have found in penetrating an economy characterized by lay-offs and plant closings? One answer is that Rhode Island still clings to industries that need entry level workers. The jewelry and related metals industries, which account for an estimated 50% of the Hmong employment, have traditionally relied on immigrant, refugee and other first and second generation workers to turn out necklaces, rings, wire and pocketknives. The pay in the jewelry/metal industry begins at minimum wage and advances slowly. As the state's largest sector of employment, the industry employed a total of 21,100 in April 1983.

Hmong report they get jobs in three ways--by themselves, through a friend or relative or through the employment agency under contract to the state resettlement program. At a group meeting with heads of household, 5 men said they got their jobs on their own; 6 through the employment agency, Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC); and 13 from a relative already employed. If job developers on the staff of the employment agency can convince employers to hire Southeast Asians, then the refugees will take it from there by supplying the boss with a stream of aunts, uncles, cousins and friends. Because the first Hmong hired knows that he is setting the example for others to follow, he works hard to earn a good work record.

One company personnel manager put it simply, "We like the Hmong because they don't steal," a significant concern with a company that deals with precious metals. Another company executive said, "The Hmong and the other Southeast Asians have the lowest absenteeism of any group we've hired."

Hmong who have moved to Providence and trained in high-tech skills elsewhere have difficulty matching their trade with a job. A young man moved

to Providence from Santa Ana, California where he had been trained as an electronic bench-tester. He was earning $10 an hour when his company laid him off after two years. He moved to Rhode Island to join other family members but was unable to find a similar job locally because the state has relatively few electronics companies. Likewise, the local employment agency under contract to the refugee program was equally unequipped to handle someone with above average skills. Eventually, he found a job on his own through the classified section of the Boston Globe. He commutes 60 miles one way to an electronics assembly plant in the greater Boston area and once again is earning $10 an hour. Although he is atypical of the average Hmong worker in Rhode Island, he very nearly settled for a lesser skilled job common to the state.

On the whole, interviews with Hmong workers did not reveal a great disparity between skills and present employment status. This may be explained, in part, by the overall absence of vocational training opportunities explictly for Southeast Asians in Rhode Island until 1984. For example, between the years of 1977-83 only 10 Hmong men were trained as machinists in non-refugee specific programs. All work today as machinists and are among the highest paid workers in the Hmong community. Until 1984, however, the strategy of the State Office of Refugee Resettlement was to concentrate on finding entry-level jobs for all employable Hmong adults. This appeared a reasonable strategy in the early 1980's for several reasons. First, the structure or the state's economy offered a steady supply of entry-level positions where willingness to work was as important, if not more important, than fluency in English. Second, the State Coordinator strongly believed that employment of any type from the first week of arrival onward, for those who are able to work, leads to self-respect, dignity and eventual

self-sufficiency. The first goal of the refugee program was full employment, which has nearly been achieved in 1984. As this goal is realized, resources will shift from the support of entry-level employment to job enhancement and upgrading including such strategies as pioneer placements in new companies, continuing education in non-work hours, more on-the-job training positions and other programs and incentives to promote job security and long-term family and community self-sufficiency, provided that new arrivals do not once again flood the state.

In the meantime, state refugee policy requires that the employment agency of record, OIC, report the names of refugees who either quit their jobs without reason or refuse a reasonable job offer. Both are grounds for denying a refugee's application for cash assistance. Those who have been cut off assistance by these ORR-imposed sanctions blame OIC, the employment counselors and the bilingual workers. As a result the employment agency is a favorite target for criticism by refugees who do not understand that the regulations imposed by OIC are federal policy. Some Hmong say that OIC places more Cambodians on jobs than Hmong. OIC responds by saying that placements depend on many factors, including (a) the skills and English ability requested by the employers; (b) the frequency with which those registered for work check into the employment office; and (c) the willingness of each applicant in the job bank to work. Others say the basic problem stems from the overall lack of job opportunities and the resulting pressures. Some companies report excellent working relationships with OIC and praise its efforts to place refugees with the desired qualifications on jobs within their companies. Other companies, because of prior dealings, are reluctant to work with OIC.

Most of the firms with more than 25 employees offer health insurance, even for jobs paying only slightly higher than minimum wage. With good reason,

Hmong are reluctant to accept a job that does not include health insurance. The number of Hmong employed in Providence would be much lower without the number of companies that currently offer health coverage as part of their wage package, although some companies offer it only for the employees, while others cover the entire family, provided the employee contributes a percentage of the premium.

About one-third of the Hmong households in Providence have two wage earners. With two incomes a family can survive without cash assistance. In many of the families with two incomes, the husband and wife take opposite shifts. Usually the wife will work the first shift, so as to be home in the evening for the children while the husband takes the second shift. By balancing shifts, the family squeezes in child care duties between two full-time jobs. In cases where the husband and wife work the same shift, the family calls on a relative for day care duty. Increasingly, a two income family will pay a modest amount of money to a relative in exchange for the child care. Rarely will a family take their children to someone outside of their lineage group.

Several employment strategies have netted results in Rhode Island. In the northern part of the state, a Lao man named Thongsvangh Phongsavan established his own employment agency at the urging of the State Office of Refugee Resettlement. His employment program, Northern Rhode Island Jobs for New Americans, is currently under a fee-for-service contract to the State Office of Refugee Resettlement. Mr. Thongsvangh, a former associate director of the Tolstoy Foundation's affiliate in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, developed a slide presentation on the types of work in the state that refugees perform. On his own, he contacted company executives with a convincing sales pitch. Between

January 1983 and April 1983, Thongsvangh singlehandedly placed 50 refugees in jobs. Although none of the new employees were Hmong (they don't live in that part of the state) it does suggest how a Southeast Asian can successfully manage a job campaign.

Another part of job development in Rhode Island is the work of a T.V. actress named Erica Hagan. She was hired for five months by the state coordinator to sell the Southeast Asians as a reliable workforce to churches and companies who have no previous contact with Southeast Asians. Ms. Hagan spent the last year touring the country on behalf of the U.S. Catholic Conference educating Americans about the refugees. Previously she lived in Ban Vinai for nearly a year. By speaking enthusiastically before churches, business and service clubs, Ms. Hagan has sparked a new interest in hiring Southeast Asians. She brings her experience as an actress on such TV programs as Kojack and the Rockford Files to interviews about the refugees on local radio and TV.

To assist Ms. Hagan in her presentations, the Hmong and Cambodian MAAs each received contracts through the MAA Incentive Grant to hire one "spokesperson." Along with Ms. Hagan, these special job developers speak about their own communities and, in turn, gain experience in the art of public relations, a skill the Hmong and Cambodians can use long after Ms. Hagan leaves.

In a two-month period, Ms. Hagan and the MAA Special Job Developers generated 71 job offers from 14 companies that had never before hired Southeast Asians.

Another strategy involves the placement of an experienced Hmong leader as a supervisor in a company that plans to hire other non-English speaking refugees. A textile firm hired a Hmong supervisor, trained him, and added an entire second shift of 14 additional Hmong who speak a minimal amount of

English. Targeted job tax credits were used as a carrot by the employment agency to encourage the company to hire refugees. The major shortcoming of this strategy is the shortage of Hmong bilingual leaders, although this will improve as the leadership becomes more fluent in English and gains additional job experience in the American workforce.

A third strategy involves using short-term training contracts as inducements for agencies and firms to hire the Hmong. Selective use of short-term training contracts was begun by the State Office of Refugee Resettlement in 1984. A three-month, short-term traning contract for electronics assembly was signed with a local training organization based on the principal of shared risk and investment in the training venture. The state agreed to pay 50% of the training cost at the beginning of the training. If the training organization places the refugee at the completion of the training with a company that pays $1 more than minimum wage, then the state pays the next 35% of the total training cost. After 30 days, if the refugee is still working at the placement site, the state pays the remaining 15% of the cost. For each refugee that the training organization trains, places, and is retained after 30 days, the state pays the full 100% cost on a per capita basis. For each refugee that the trainer is unable to place, the organization absorbs the percentage of the contract that is contingent on placement--in this case 50%. This creates a financial incentive for the trainer to provide quality training to insure that their graduates are employable.

Cable Electric is typical of the type of company that needs no inducements to hire the Hmong. The company, located in the heart of the Hmong community, makes electrical wiring devices, switches and extension cords. Cable offers entry-level jobs to a variety of limited-English speaking people, including

refugees and immigrants. In normal times, the plant has 500 employees. Currently only 300 people work at Cable, one-third of whom are refugees. According to the manager, the pay scale ranges from $3.60 to $7 an hour. Production workers earn the base rate of $3.60 plus a piecework rate. Ninety percent of the refugees earn above the base rate. For benefits, they may choose between Blue Cross or a health maintenance organization.

"I'll hire any who can work," said the manager, a stocky man in his late fifties.

> The refugees have a good record. Every one of them follows company rules. They come to work every day. And they do good quality work. They have excellent dexterity. The experienced ones train the new ones. What amazes me is their loyalty. When we have to lay off and later call them back, they come, even if they found another job. I hope the Hmong don't think of working here forever. They should realize working here is not a very good job. I hope they will improve themselves.

The manager has seen immigrant groups come and go through his factory. He hopes that the Hmong will work themselves up and out of entry-level jobs as they gain more education and experience in Providence.

What is the present employment experience of the Hmong in Providence? Where do the Hmong stand in the spectrum between entry-level and better-paying jobs? And finally, what is the relationship between employment and welfare assistance? To shed light on these and other questions, the Hmong mutual assistance association in Providence conducted a door-to-door survey of its community during the summer of 1983. The interviews were done by Hmong college students hired by the Hmong-Lao Unity Association in partnership with local college and university work-study programs. Although the results have not been completely tabulated, a sample of data on employment and welfare was prepared for inclusion for the Hmong Resettlement Study, with the permission

of the Hmong-Lao Unity Association. The data reported here covers a single clan group living in Providence and includes both working and nonworking families. All 43 families that comprise the clan group agreed to participate in the survey. This group represented 19% of all Hmong families living in Providence in August, 1983.

As can be seen from the accompanying tables, 75% of the families in the sample clan have at least one person working. This represents an extraordinarily high level of employment, exceeded only by the Hmong in sunbelt communities like Dallas, and Fort Smith, Arkansas. Only one-quarter of the families in the Providence sample clan are not working--and as will be seen later--most of this group is categorically eligible for assistance in the same way as other state residents.

Like other Americans, the Hmong in Providence have begun to realize that two wage earners per family are essential for getting off welfare. Slightly less than one-third (30%) of all families in the sample clan have two wage earners. Hmong women enjoy a growing reputation for their dexterity; any woman with the desire to work and who is not overwhelmed by either the size or infancy of her family can find employment. The wife works in 9 out of 12 families who have achieved self-sufficiency. A second wage earner makes the difference between those who remain on supplementary assistance and food stamps and those who have cleared the high hurdle to self-sufficiency.

The members of the sample clan perform a variety of jobs. Some hold "white collar" jobs as teacher aides and human service workers. Others, with a modicum of training, have found skilled "blue collar" positions as welders and toolmakers. By far the majority, however, hold entry-level jobs as dishwashers, sewing machine operators and assemblers. The leading types of jobs include jewelry (10 out of 40 jobs) machine operator (6 out of 40), and

assembly (also 6 out of 40). One-half of the jobs reported by the group fell into one of these three categories.

No matter what the job, Hmong earn wages well below the average for manufacturing jobs in Rhode Island. None of the 40 Hmong workers in the sample clan reached the statewide factory average of $6.42 per hour. The average Hmong wage was $4.51, a full 35% lower than what the average factory worker earned in 1983. Nearly half of the Hmong earned between $4.00 and $4.99 per hour, two dollars less per hour than the average. Although many work, most earn poverty wages.

The presence of health insurance in Rhode Island lessens the shock of moving from cash assistance to an entry-level job. In the sample clan of 43 families, 38 had medical coverage--90% of all families in the group were covered either by private health insurance from their company or through public assistance. Of the 33 families who had at least one person working, 30 families were covered by some form of health insurance. Two-thirds of these thirty families (20 families in all) were covered by private insurance. The remaining ten were covered under the medical assistance portion of the state's General Public Assistance program or were covered by virtue of being on workfare. Only three of the working families reported no form of health insurance. Those that do not receive company benefits may qualify for medical assistance under the state GPA program. The near universal health insurance coverage for Hmong families contributes to the high labor force participation. By taking a job, health insurance benefits are not penalized.

A closer look at the types of assistance received by the sample clan shows that the group as a whole has very nearly achieved self-sufficiency. Only 9 families out of 43 (21%) do not work. All nine families, however, are

categorically eligible for either GPA or AFDC by following the same rules that apply to other Americans. None of the nine receive refugee cash assistance. To find employment for the last seven unemployed families in the sample clan means finding jobs and the support services for AFDC widows and medically impaired individuals. Every other family in the sample clan has at least one person working. Job upgrading, rather than job placement, has become the next challenge for the refugee program in Providence.

Table 5

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF ONE HMONG CLAN
IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND, AS OF AUGUST 1983

(Size of Group: 43 Families)

1. The majority of families have at least one person working

   75% (32) of families have one person working
   25% (11) of families have no one working

2. Thirty percent (13 out of 43) families have two people working

3. Twenty-eight percent (12 out of 43) families are 100% self-sufficient

4. Types of Employment Within the Clan Group:

Jewelry	10	Office Clerk	2
Machine Operator	6	Plating Operator	1
Assembly	6	Welder	1
Workfare	5	Fabric Handler	1
Fishpacker	3	Messenger	1
Human Service	3	Dishwasher	1
Sewing Machine Operator	2	Toolmaker	1
		Teacher's Aide	1
		Grocery Clerk	1

Table 5
Continued

5. Average Wage: $4.51

6. Wage Distribution of 40 Employed Adults in Group:

	$3.99/hr	$4.-$4.99/hr	$5-$5.99/hr	$6.00/hr
# of People	14	19	5	2
% of Group	35%	47.5%	12.5%	5%

7. Distribution of Health Insurance Among 43 Families in One Hmong Clan:

	Health Insurance from Job	Health Insurance from Public Assistance	No Insurance
Families with at Least One Person Working	20	10	3
Families on AFDC, GPA, RCA and No One Working	-	8	-
Families With No One Working and No One on Assistance	-	-	1
	20	18	4

Total Number with Health Insurance: 38
Total Number without Health Insurance: 4

Table 5

TYPES OF ASSISTANCE RECEIVED BY FAMILIES
IN SAMPLE CLAN GROUP, AUGUST 1983 (N=43)

Working Families	Number of Families	Comments
Workfare & Food Stamps	4	Intact families where male head-of-household works 35 hours per week to receive benefits
GPA Supplemental & Food Stamps	2	Categorically eligible, partial GPA benefits to raise wages to AFDC payment level
Food Stamps Only	5	
Workfare Only	1	
Non Working Families		
GPA & Food Stamps	2	Categorically eligible, usually because of medical disabilities
AFDC & Food Stamps	7	Categorically eligible, includes 5 widows
Non-Working Individuals	4	Four individuals categorically eligible
SSI		over 65

Welfare Dependence

The overall cash assistance rate for Rhode Island's refugee population was 30% for September 1983. There were 1,215 people (417 families) on all forms of assistance out of a total refugee population of 7,250.

The cash assistance dependency rate can be broken down further:

Cases Under 36 Months	465 Families	1,463 People
Cases Over 36 Months	166 Families	713 People

Of the cases over 36 months:

Categorically Eligible for AFDC	80 Families	291 People
Categorically Eligible for GPA	86 Families	713 People

The average refugee family size for families on GPA is 8.3 persons. This is larger than either the average Hmong family of 6 or the average refugee family size of 3.6 on AFDC. The larger family size is a contributing factor to families' prolonged stay on public assistance.

The Hmong make up 70% of the families on GPA over 36 months, while the Cambodians comprise 21% and the Laotians 9%. This may be explained in part by the relatively recent arrival of the majority of the Cambodian population in Providence compared to the Hmong. Most of the Cambodians have not reached the 36-month limitation. The Hmong population, on the other hand, has reached or is now reaching its time-expired limit of 36 months. Thus, a higher proportion of Hmong would be expected to appear on GPA.

Beyond these factors, however, may lie an unknown number of Hmong families destined to remain on the workfare program indefinitely. This group is of particular concern to both the Hmong community and to the city and state.

For the Hmong community, the men on workfare are most likely to be the 45- to 60-year-old heads of household with little English language abilities or practical job experience in the United States. They are the least employable members of the Hmong community but the most respected because of their age and community status.

For the state, the concern lies in the continuing cost of families on General Public Assistance, a cost which is born fully by state tax dollars. This group of 45- to 60-year-olds will be the priority for the targeted assistance funds that Providence expects to receive in FY 84.

Hmong often begin a discussion of welfare by pointing out that in Laos there was no welfare system. A young leader in his thirties remembers, "In our country we got up at dawn. We farmed till dusk. We carried water up and down the mountains. We worked hard. We sweat and were happy." Other Hmong remember their fateful interview in the refugee camp when they promised to work hard in America and not be a burden to the government. Still others, the early arrivals in 1976 and 1977, recall that their sponsors in Providence never told them about welfare. A man said, "I went to work two weeks after I came to Providence. What could I do? I had to support my family."

Hmong leaders estimate that between 1976 and 1978 about 90% of the Hmong heads of household in Providence were working. At least five factors are responsible for the low dependency rate:

(1) The local economy was expanding and absorbed the Hmong as entry-level workers.

(2) The Hmong population was small. In 1976 the Hmong population was between 400 and 500; and in 1977 between 600 and 700.

(3) Not only did Providence have relatively few Hmong, but the Cambodians, who are now the city's largest Southeast Asian group, had not arrived in any significant numbers. Before 1978, there were estimated to be only 500 Cambodians in Providence. By 1983, their numbers had grown to 2,500.

(4) During this period there were no bilingual Hmong workers employed at the welfare office. Without Hmong case aides, the Hmong community generally did not know that welfare existed, or if it did, how to apply.

(5) English as a Second Language was not widely offered or viewed as an alternative to employment.

By 1980 these factors changed. The state's economy soured; unemployment topped 12%; the Hmong population broke the 2,000 mark and neared 2,300 by year's end; and Cambodian arrivals outpaced the Hmong, putting a further strain on the supply of entry-level jobs.

In response to the burgeoning number of non-English speaking people in Providence, the state expanded the number of English language programs available to Southeast Asians. In 1980 a complete refugee service unit was added to the Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services' main office in downtown Providence, with Hmong, Lao, Vietnamese and Cambodian bilingual staff. For the first time, a Hmong person could pick up the phone and speak to someone who spoke his or her language at the welfare office.

The welfare system became more accessible at the same time as the number of job openings plunged to an all time post-depression low. During this period certain national and local leaders reportedly urged the Hmong to stay on welfare as long as possible. This, combined with the attitude that the Hmong were entitled to cash assistance because of their military service in Southeast Asia, promoted welfare dependency. What had been a minority of the Hmong community on welfare prior to 1980 became the majority by 1981.

Cash assistance in Rhode Island is not an entitlement. In order to collect, a refugee must register for work with the state's employment agency and agree to accept the first reasonable job offer. No one receives cash assistance, including secondary migrants, without scrutiny by a "disposition" panel that includes the Hmong case manager, the job counselor, the ESL coordinator, and representatives from the welfare department. When a refugee applies for cash assistance, he or she gets a job counselor, a Hmong case manager, and assignment to an ESL class in one swoop. Applicants to cash assistance trigger the priority services whose major purpose is to get a

refugee off cash assistance. If a refugee is found to have quit a job without reason, it is grounds for denying cash assistance to the applicant. These policies put great pressure on the Hmong bilingual employees of the welfare office and the employment office. Twice in recent months, disgruntled refugees have threatened the Hmong counselor at the employment office, once with an unsigned death letter and once at knife point. As refugee policies become more restrictive, the front-line Hmong bilingual workers take abuse from other refugees who believe the worker behind the desk is personally responsible for instigating the policy changes.

In the minds of some informants, the federal government waited for the worst possible moment to announce a massive cutback in welfare assistance. On April 1, 1982, federally reimbursed cash assistance for a refugee family was reduced from 36 to 18 months after arrival. As one leader said, "When the government finally push the Hmong to get out from welfare, there are no jobs. The economy is rotten."

Some of the older arrivals, men who arrived in 1976 and 1977, who never took welfare--and say so proudly--now say that the Hmong would be better off today if they had never received welfare, except for the old, sick, widowed or disabled. The availability of cash assistance and the fact that a majority of the community came to rely on it did nothing to improve the future of the community, they say. Cash assistance is like smoking opium, some say. Both are addictive and, once tried, can be difficult to resist. Too few Hmong took the opportunity of their time on cash assistance to learn a skill or improve their lives. In their cynical moments, informants compare cash assistance to the rice that Americans dropped from the air over their country, after their rice fields were destroyed. One day the rice stopped coming. The Hmong were without their traditional means of livelihood or the support from the air they

relied on. Likewise, in April 1982, a large number of families received a notice informing them that their cash assistance was ending. In some states, like Washington and Oregon, terminations resulted in a significant number of families moving to the Central Valley of California. In Rhode Island, the effect of the 18-month cutoff was cushioned by the existence of the state's General Public Assistance program. But in the minds of many it was as if, without warning, the rice had once again ceased falling from the sky.

The cash assistance dependency rate in Providence declined from 63% in January 1981 to 16.7% in September 1983. The decline is especially significant in the context of the state's chronically high unemployment rate. Overall, Rhode Island has the highest statewide unemployment rate of any state in New England--yet the lowest refugee dependency rate. In January 1983, the unemployment rate for New England was 8.9%; in Rhode Island the unemployment rate was 12.2%, 3.3 percentage points above its neighboring states. For the same period, the refugee dependency rate for New England averaged 50%; for Rhode Island it was 30%. Almost twice the percentage of refugees were working in Rhode Island as in the other New England states.

There are several confounding explanations for the precipitous decline in dependency. One, of course, is the simple expiration of eligibility for refugee cash assistance. Another is sanctions which deny cash assistance to refugees who have left jobs without good cause. A third is the state's aggressive job compaign that turns up minimum wage jobs, such as packing fish, that many other Americans disdain. A fourth factor is the low-tech structure of the state's economy which continues to need entry-level workers. A final factor is the presence of supplemental GPA which boosts a working family's wage up to the GPA standard in instances of minimum wage income and large family size.

Regardless of the dependency rate, there is concern over the refugees on cash assistance who have been in the United States over 36 months. In March, 1983 there were 166 Southeast Asian refugee families involving 713 people on either AFDC or GPA over 36 months. Of the total number of families on assistance over 36 months, nearly half (80 families or 48%) are categorically eligible for AFDC. These families meet the same requirements as any other group--death, absence, unemployment or incapcacity of a parent with dependents, all valid reasons for their inability to work. That leaves 42% of the families over 36 months on General Public Assistance. In March 1983 this group included 86 families. A closer look at this set of families shows that slightly more than 60% of this group are already working. Forty people (47% of the group) are able-bodied men with families to support who cannot find work. These heads of household receive general public assistance to maintain their families. Under state law, these men are required to work 40 hours a week in order to collect their full GPA benefits, which also include medical coverage. They work in the parks, at the city docks and at other city-owned properties. Far from sitting at home, collecting GPA, these men report to work five days a week. They are given top billing for available jobs by the employment agency. But their lack of English and prior work experience makes them the least prepared of all refugees for work in America.

Another group that collects GPA is also working full time. Twenty-four of 86 families (15%) on GPA receive supplemental assistance because their wage income falls below the standard of need for their family size. Under state law, these families are categorically eligible to receive partial assistance to boost their incomes up to the GPA standard. A Hmong man earning minimum wage in a jewelry factory cannot support a family of six--the average size in Providence. With supplemental assitance, a man with a large family can accept

an entry-level job, knowing that the state will add to his income until he reaches the GPA standard for his family's size. The presence of supplemental assistance in Rhode Island lessens the shock of leaving 100% cash assistance for a minimum-wage job.

A promising employment strategy under development in Rhode Island will turn refugee cash assistance (RCA) into a source of on-the-job training funds. In doing so, the idea begins to answer one of the fundamental charges leveled by the Hmong across the country about welfare; namely, it is simply maintenance and does little to actually improve "our new lives."

The experiment in Rhode Island proposes to subsidize full-time positions for six months in the private sector for 60 recipients of refugee cash assistance who have been in the United States for less than 18 months. Half of the $4.50 per hour wages would be paid by the company; the Office of Refugee Resettlement pays the other half. Refugees hired under the diversion program would be retained to the fullest possible extent by participating companies. No refugee who joins the program will make less on the job than he or she did while on cash assistance. A review of 62 AFDC cases in October 1983 showed that only two cases would receive more on cash assistance than in an OJT position at $4.50 per hour.

To succeed, the diversion program must offer medical coverage. Full medical assistance is part of welfare coverage. No refugee family would give up full medical coverage for an "experiment" that exposes them to loss of health insurance. The state estimates 20% of the total wages paid would cover the costs of buying into a health maintenance organization or otherwise prepaying medical coverage with a local ambulatory clinic, with back-up by a major city hospital. The other cost factor is administration of the diversion program, which the state estimates to be 15% of total wages paid in the OJT

contracts. Preliminary analysis shows a favorable cost benefit ratio. The state expects not only to save money by diversion over what it would otherwise pay out in cash and medical benefits, but, most importantly, to place refugees directly in the labor market. At the very least, the refugee will gain six months of job experience during his "tenure" at the company. State resettlement officials hope that the refugee worker will prove his or her worth to the company in the first six months of the trial. Once seeing the value of his labor, the company will retain the new employee beyond the initial period of the subsidy. Even if the refugee is laid off after six months, he or she will at least have gained valuable work experience and a positive attitude toward working. In the future, the State Office of Refugee Resettlement would prefer to avoid the welfare system altogether by placing new arrivals directly in jobs, with English language instruction in the non-work hours.

Welfare benefits in other states still tempt Hmong in Rhode Island. Between 1983-84 approximately 50 families moved from Rhode Island principally to Wisconsin and the Central Valley of California, places known to have more lenient welfare regulations than Rhode Island. The presence of so many relatives in one place where, in the words of one Hmong leader "the government doesn't bother you," weakens the will of Hmong to remain in a state that demands employment. "It would be lots of fun to move to Fresno," said one Hmong head of household.

> It's like a big party. I've been there. But I think that 70% of the Hmong in California are lost. They have a dark future because they don't prepare for it. California and Wisconsin make it hard for us to control our people here in Rhode Island. If a family in Providence has a problem, with welfare or his employer or the community--instead of solving it, they think about moving. They say things will be better. But their problems follow them like the bad spirit. If every state had the same welfare the Hmong would not think so much about moving to escape their problems.

Job Training

Until 1984 there were no vocational education programs in Rhode Island strictly for Southeast Asians. The philosophy of the state's refugee program, prior to 1984 was to find, encourage and place every employable refugee on a job. Vocational training took a second seat to an aggressive job development program--backed up by ESL, support for the Hmong MAA and welfare sanctions for those who quit jobs without cause or refused to take a reasonable job offer. The result was job placements, usually in entry-level jobs for up to 90% of the employable Hmong by 1984. Vocational training did not become a priority for the state refugee program until the majority of the Hmong community was working. Seen in these terms, the purpose of vocational training was not to place Hmong in their first job but to upgrade and expand on existing skills. Vocational training for the Hmong, at least in Rhode Island, appears most successful when the trainee already has some work experience, has decided to live a self-sufficient life, and appreciates the role of additional training as a way of improving the value of one's labor.

These values are a by-product of what the State Refugee Coordinator terms "paying your dues." In his opinion, the first decade of the Hmong community's presence in Rhode Island will be spent establishing a reputation in the labor market. According to this philosophy, it makes little sense to train a Hmong as a carpenter if contractors and the carpenter's union implicitly resent the Hmong. However, as Hmong achieve a reputation, as they have begun doing in Rhode Island as hard workers, taxpayers, home owners and law-abiding citizens, opportunities such as high paying union jobs will begin to appear. The job of the Hmong MAA and their American colleagues is to effectively communicate this progress to the general public, selected employers and to political elites.

Prior to 1984, when the emphasis was on initial job placement, only a few Hmong found their way into training programs that are available to other residents of the State. However, these opportunities are scattered among a number of agencies, none of which has a coherent approach for recruiting Southeast Asians or placing them in jobs for which they are supposedly being trained. The Hmong have three general comments about vocational education in Rhode Island:

1) There are too few programs;

2) If a refugee is fortunate enough to be accepted into a program, then the training is too short to prepare him for a job; and

3) There is no guarantee of a job once the training is completed.

It should be noted that much of the status of job training in Rhode Island will change in the next year. Providence County has been selected to receive a targeted assistance award of $403,000 for employment and training services. These funds will address one of the State's weakest areas in refugee resettlement: the absence of a coordinated vocational education program for refugees who lack the experience and credentials to compete in the labor market.

In 1982, a small number of Southeast Asians did manage to enroll in vocational education programs run by the State Division of Vocational Education. According to figures furnished by the Division, 143 Asians were taking vocational classes. (Because the State has virtually no Asians other than the Indochinese refugees, the vast majority of Asians recorded in any survey conducted in Rhode Island have to be Southeast Asians.) Unfortunately, the Division keeps no records of the ethnic groups represented by the Asians in their classes. Hmong informants say that their people are represented throughout the vocational education slots. The 1982 second technical day enrollments in Rhode Island for Southeast Asians were:

	Men	Women
Nursing	-	6
Data Processing	1	-
Clerical	-	12
Auto Body	11	-
Electronics	47	6
Graphics	1	-
Machine Shop	42	-
Welding	8	3
Food Service	3	3

The majority of men were preparing for jobs as electronic assemblers or as machinists, two of the better paying jobs in the Rhode Island economy.

Vocational instruction is also available in the high schools. Statewide, there were 69 Asian high school students enrolled in vocational classes as of June 1982. A breakdown by field of interest showed:

	Men	Women
Fashion Design	-	4
Secretarial Science	-	1
Agriculture	-	1
Business Education	8	29
Auto Repair	2	-
Electronics	2	-
Graphics	-	2
Machine Shop	4	-
Jewelry Design	1	-
Paralegal	7	-
Food Services	3	1
Small Engine Repair	3	-
Maintenance	1	-

The third and last form of adult education was conducted in the high schools of the state's cities and towns. These adult education classes are conducted at the "interest level" and are not directed to vocational placement. These classes include ESL, as well as interest classes in home and auto repair and dozens of other practical subjects. The Division of Vocational Education reported that 715 Asians were served in adult education

during the 1982-83 school year. The majority of these were in ESL, pre-GED and GED classes. The adult basic education classes in the City of Providence had the most students in this sector, 285 students.

Vocational education is seen by most of the Hmong informants as the key to employment for the middle age refugees who have no marketable skills in America. "Without job training my father feels he will be on welfare for the rest of his life," said the son of an unemployed "elder." For these individuals, job training must go hand in hand with additional ESL instruction directed especially to the vocabulary requirements of the anticipated position. For some positions, such as machinist, knowledge of mathematics is required. A machinist must understand a blueprint. A Hmong leader, himself a machinist, said, "But how can a young man, much less a middle-age man, learn to read a blueprint in the 16 weeks of his training?"

Training opportunities became more plentiful in 1984 when the Rhode Island State Department of Education, Division of Vocational Education began a vocational training program with slots set aside for Southeast Asians. Classes were established for machinists, paralegal training, nurse's aid and dental assistant. Of 99 students enrolled in the vocational classes during 1984, 37 were Southeast Asians. With 11 students, the Hmong represented nearly 30% of the group. Three Hmong were accepted for paralegal training, 4 for the machinist training, and 4 in the nursing assistant program. Nearly 200 Southeast Asians applied for the vocational training program but were turned away for lack of space.

The 15-week program attracted Hmong for several reasons. With the exception of the machinist training, classes were held in non-work hours--in the evenings and on weekends. No one had to quit a job to take the training which in no way guaranteed placement. Trainees were not asked to choose

between their steady job as a machine operator and the uncertain chance of getting hired as a machinist at the end of the training. Second, the training included 2 days per week of vocational-specific ESL, taught by a teacher with previous experience in the subject. Third, each class had funds to hire a bilingual instructor to assist the American teacher. In the case of the machinist class, a Hmong man with 1-1/2 years of machinist training helped to co-teach the class. For his part, the Hmong teacher was sent to college to learn about the art of vocational instruction. In this case the Hmong man with previous machinist training received six credits from Rhode Island College in Education.

The major shortcoming of the program, in the opinion of the Hmong machinist who served as co-teacher was its brevity.

> Fifteen weeks isn't long enough to feel confident about your machines. Some Hmong--those with a natural ability, can do OK. But most need a longer time. I suggested to the director of the program that it be six or nine months long instead of 3-1/2 months. Half of my 10 students will have a hard time getting a job as a machinist. The program is over when it should be starting.

What are the characteristics of those refugees who need job training in order to get off assistance? The state employment agency of record, OIC, completed a profile of refugees without jobs who have been in the country for longer than 36 months. Of the 26 individuals in this sample, 15 were Hmong. All of the individuals in the group were men, 14 had poor proficiency in English, 3 had fair proficiency in English and 9 had what the employment agency termed good English skills. Eleven of the 26 had previous work experience in America, while the majority, 15, had none. A few had training in their own countries, incuding one truck mechanic, one forklift operator, one elementary school teacher, one policeman and one barber. In America, one man had previous job training as a machine operator, one in autobody repair

and one in electronics assembly. The major problem facing these men, in the opinion of the employment agency, was "an attitudinal problem," meaning that the men were discouraged about the prospects of ever finding work. Some felt they would never learn enough English to be employable. Others did not want to start a job that was beneath their dignity or begin at minimum wage. Eight of the men said they had health problems which interfered in their activities and made some jobs difficult.

These are the individuals that the targeted assistance program should address. The first task comtemplated by the targeted assistance program is an assessment of the barriers faced by those Southeast Asians who are underemployed. For the widows who are categorically eligible for AFDC, a major barrier to employment is day care facilities, according to the State's targeted assistance plan. For others, lack of transportation to and from the work site is a barrier to employment. For others, English language remains a barrier which can be addressed by surrounding the non-English speaking worker with bilingual employees. For still others, the barrier is psychological. A minority of Hmong still don't believe that the key to survival in America is employment.

Several informants told a story about two Hmong who came to Providence at the same time. One took a menial, dirty job for $2.25 an hour that was beneath his dignity--sweeping floors in a school. His friend, a man of equal status in Laos, stayed home. Five years later, the man who began sweeping floors had been promoted several times. He makes almost $6 an hour. He and his sons have bought their home. The other man, who could not bring himself to take the entry-level job, was still at home, dreaming about Laos.

The near absence of job training in Rhode Island has led to some of the secondary out-migration. A couple who came to Providence directly from

Thailand in 1976 moved to Minnesota three years later when the wife was laid off her job. They moved because they had heard Twin Cities offered good training--and they had a brother and other relatives there. In Minnesota they learned English and both trained to be machinists. When the wife could not find a job in St. Paul as a machinist, they moved back to Providence. They found jobs themselves through the newspaper. The husband earns $4.50 an hour at Bulova Watch Company and the wife earns $4.35 an hour in a jewelry company. They both would like to work as machinists some day. Their story says St. Paul has good job training, but not jobs; Rhode Island has jobs but no training. This family artfully combined the best of both worlds. Together they earn nearly $10 an hour. They live on the first floor of a house owned by the wife's brother-in-law and are fully self-sufficient.

Education

In the 1982-83 school year, Southeast Asians made up 10.97% of the total K-12 in the Providence City School System. According to enrollment figures supplied by the school, 1,946 students were Southeast Asians out of a total school population of 18,000. Slightly more than 1 out of 10 students in the city schools are Southeast Asians. There were 675 Hmong students in the 1982-1983 school year.

In academic year 1982-83, one out of every 450 residents in Rhode Island was a school age refugee child, the highest per capita ration of any state in the country, exceeding even California. According to figures supplied by the U.S. Department of Education, California has a ratio of 1 refugee of school age for every 659 residents. Although California has 35,924 refugee children enrolled in 1983 compared to Rhode Island's 2,103, California's state population in 1980 was 23,668,000, compared to Rhode Island's 947,154. On a

per capita basis, Rhode Island schools have absorbed a higher ratio of refugee children than California.

Like many urban school systems, the Providence Public Schools absorb thousands of students whose first language is not English. Teachers in Providence face the daunting prospect of teaching English to students who speak 44 different languages. At last count, one-quarter (22%) of the 18,000 students in the system were classified as having limited proficiency in English. These 3,967 students divided into three groups, none of which includes a specific count for Hmong:

a) students with little or no English language skills;
b) students with minimal English language skills; and
c) students who require remedial instruction in English.

There is no bilingual instruction for Southest Asians in the Providence school system. Instead, the schools have hired about 30 bilingual classroom aides. Approximately 18 of these are Hmong. As of yet, there are no Hmong who are certified teachers in Rhode Island.

A teacher who has taught Hmong for over six years said, "The cultural adjustments for the Hmong are much harder than for any group I've encountered in school." Other teachers agreed. "They never come to you with a problem," one teacher said.

> They're afraid to ask questions. Their attitude is: A teacher is god. That's flattering to me as a teacher but it gets in the way. We never know what's on their minds, what's bothering them. I have a hard time convincing them that it's okay to question a teacher in America.

Hmong students shine in math. "They love it," one of their teachers said. "They study hard and get 100% and the taste of success that everyone needs. It's the damn English that takes so long to figure out."

Hmong students may take up to three hours of English instruction per day. As a result, the Hmong students "know more about the formal structure of

English than many native-born Americans," said a teacher. "We teach English the old-fashioned way," he continued.

> We diagram sentences, we drill, we practice, we go over the mechanics, again and again. We can teach them to speak intelligently and to construct individually correct sentences, but the toughest problem is learning how to write those papers. Those that get into college are buried by the term paper.

The lack of discipline in the city school system concerns Hmong parents and their children. Some wonder if their children are learning enough. In the elementary grades, the Southeast Asians are lumped together in the same classroom as opposed to mainstreaming. In the upper grades, the limited English speaking students are placed in the same classroom. How much English can my son learn if he's in the same room with the Hmong students, wonders one parent. A few parents have turned to parochial schools for the tougher academic requirements. Hmong parents have pointedly asked school administrators for more homework for their children and additional discipline in the classrooms as a whole.

A Hmong college graduate in Providence, himself one of the first teenagers to arrive in Providence in 1976, noticed a changing attitude on the part of the more recent Hmong high school students.

> I was part of the first group to come to Providence. The only thing we knew how to do was stay at home and study together. I notice that Hmong high school students are now less motivated than we were. Today the high school kids have their own soccer teams, bands and roller skating parties. There's so many competing activities. They're much better at slang than study skills.

This observation points to the rapid secularization of the Hmong world by American mass culture and raises important questions about future trends in the educational achievements of Hmong children.

According to the college students, about 21 Hmong attended college in Rhode Island in 1982-83. About 10 students attended community colleges; about

10 attended Rhode Island College; and one attended Brown University. In September 1983, the first Hmong to be accepted into Boston College began his studies, supported by loans, grants and a scholarship from the state's largest bank. Several Hmong students attended the University of Rhode Island, but either dropped out or transferred. All of the college students except one are men.

College enrollment figures for Hmong students increased dramatically in the 1983-84 academic year. In June 1983, 32 Hmong graduated from high schools in Providence. Of this group, approximately 23 attended college and 11 entered the labor force. Fully two-thirds of the graduating seniors entered college. Seven attended Rhode Island College--the state's four-year college--and 15 enrolled at the community college. Of significance is the fact that all seven of the Hmong attending Rhode Island College are members of a special college enrichment program called Upward Bound, which is described in Volume 3 of the Hmong Resettlement Study Final Report. Without the special tutoring and stipends provided by this federally funded program, far fewer Hmong seniors would be enrolling in a four-year program directly after high school.

Financial aid is available for Hmong students who are admitted to public colleges in Rhode Island. Under the federal Pell grant program, a student at the Community College of Rhode Island, for example, receives a grant that, in most cases, is more than enough to cover tuition and books. Students at the more expensive four-year colleges also qualify for financial aid in the form of guaranteed student loans, summer jobs and work-study during the academic year. Although college loans are available, they are sources of anxiety for those students who are not on full financial aid. "We wonder if we'll be able to get a good job after we graduate," said one student, speaking for himself

and others. "Car loans, loans for a house--my family and I worry about all the money we owe other people."

Besides the financial aid, the Community College has also hired a bilingual Hmong leader as a Southeast Asian counselor. This individual arranges appointments with admissions officers, financial aid staff, academic counselors and generally is a single point of reference for Hmong students who are new to the system or who might get lost once they are enrolled. The presence of a Hmong counselor is a signal to the community that college is within reach for those who finish high school or pass the high school equivalency exam.

The Hmong college students are about evenly divided between full and part-time enrollments. Those attending part-time say they do so in order to help supplement their family's income by working. Others say they are taking a reduced load in order to devote more time to study. These students say they are not yet ready to manage a full course load due, in large part, to their marginal preparation in high school for the rigor of college-level instruction.

Most of the college students study engineering or computer science, in hopes of getting a job immediately after graduation. Although Providence has too few Hmong college graduates to bear this out, the current crop of students in Rhode Island has heard rumors from other states that Hmong college graduates have had a difficult time finding a job after completing college. The ripple effect of this rumor has prompted high school students to question the wisdom of attending a four-year college, in the opinion of one Hmong college student. "Many high school students are thinking twice about going to college," he said. "Right now about half the high school graduates go to work, the other half to go college."

Those that do manage to push on to college have mixed feelings about their responsibilities to the larger Hmong community. Those interviewed said they feel the urge to get away from the community, to live apart, to leave the frustrations of serving a community that doesn't appreciate their struggle. Some of the college students say they want to live on their own until they have "made it" and then return to the community with the power and reputation to be a well-respected leader.

Some teachers with experience teaching the Hmong expressed concern that, in some instances, counselors and instructors were not stressing the importance of adequate preparation in English. In their opinion, it was too easy for Hmong high school students to get by on watered-down ESL classes. As one teacher said, "As long as they do well in math and are quiet, obedient students, the system excuses them having to perform equally well in English and history." Another teacher, with five years of Hmong teaching experience said, "As teachers we are too quick to stereotype the Hmong into fields like computer science at the expense of their overall education. But we're doing these students a disservice if we let them pass with only a marginal command of English."

Another teacher spoke of the pressure felt by Hmong students to achieve high academic results. College counselors report that Hmong students were known to get up at 3 a.m. to cram for a test or put in extra study time. "We've got to teach the Hmong students who go on to college how to slow down and relax," said one teacher who traced nosebleeds and fainting spells in her class back to stress and lack of sleep by several Hmong students. "Hmong students are the subject of unrealistic demands and expectations from many sources, including well-intentioned Americans who want them to get ahead."

Hmong women are absent from college for a number of reasons. The college students say that about 95% of the Hmong women never finish high school. Their teachers agree. Most leave for marriage. Once gone, few return. "The majority of Hmong girls are pregnant when they marry," says a college student, himself unmarried. High school teachers are reluctant to interfere with a practice that is approved by the families concerned and sanctioned by the community at large. High school teachers say they rarely see the young wives again, although one teacher gestured to a young Hmong student in his class.

> She is 16 years old. Recently she had her first child. I never thought I'd see her again. Then she reappeared. But this time she works 40 hours a week, from 4 p.m. until midnight in a jewelry factory and shows up for school the next day at 8 a.m.

There is a growing recognition in the Hmong community that pregnancy is a leading factor in the number of teenage marriages. Other factors of course contribute, but Hmong college students and the MAA leaders agree on the need for sex education and information on birth control and family planning. The MAA proposed to use one-quarter of its Hmong/Highlander Initiative funds to start a training course in birth control counseling for men and women from each clan. The plan calls for each clan group to choose several people to receive training from Planned Parenthood and the local neighborhood health center. After learning the basic elements of reproductive biology, birth control methods and counseling techniques, the "counselors'" names would be "endorsed" by the elders, who themselves would be invited to several orientation sessions on the same subjects given by Americans with appropriate age, gender and status to the Hmong leaders. The end result will be a nucleus of Hmong within each extended family group that has accurate information on birth control and can make informed referrals. By working within the clan system, the confidentiality of the discussion between "counselor" and client

can be maintained. Those individuals who feel more comfortable going outside their clan group for information are of course free to do so. The purpose of the entire program is to bring the subject of pregnancy into the open by involving all three age groups--the elders, the parents, and the teenagers and college students.

Most of the high school men marry while in high school. "The guys will stick it out," says a teacher familiar with Hmong students. "Ninety percent of them are married by the time they graduate. If they do drop out, it's financial. They've been cut from assistance and it's either go to work or no food."

Some leave for marriage and early parenthood, others leave because their parents move to another state. A teacher sadly recalled a Hmong family who moved to Merced, California last year. Their oldest son was at Rhode Island College in a special enrichment program for talented students from minority backgrounds. "The parents pulled their kid out of college to pick lettuce or something for $2 an hour," the teacher said.

> The pity is that his kid was making it. I was one of his teachers who pushed and encouraged and helped him get into the college program. He was assured of graduating. He cashed in a free college education, a stipend of $90 a month plus all the extra help he wanted to be a migrant laborer.

The teacher paused.

> Every other immigrant group has sacrificed for their children. Some of the Hmong aren't doing that. Every time they uproot, the kids pay the price in terms of their education. Over and over, I've seen Hmong leave behind opportunities for their fantasies in another state. It's the kids who suffer quietly.

The young men who defy the odds to pursue higher education speak of their lack of role models. "We're looking for a way out of Hmong culture," said one college student. "We know the problems of the old ways." Another student said, "The whole Hmong family structure has to change. It's changing: Those

who can speak English--learn. Those who don't are torn and confused." A third said, "We are realizing that the way we used to live is no longer functional." A fourth, a college senior, said,

> The leaders don't listen to me because I'm not married... In Hmong culture you can't be a man without a family of your own. This value tells Hmong to marry. It is very difficult to be a college student and not married. I want to go to graduate school so that I can help my people. With a wife I can never do that so I'm keeping myself single. Nobody knows the isolation I feel in my heart.

Many college kids say it's increasingly difficult to respect their elders--the traditional source of leadership. "We are looking for someone to lead us, someone who believes that the Hmong are one people, not a bunch of clans," says another college student. "Forget about the clans," another says bluntly.

> There's only one clan left in America--Hmong. But we have all been conditioned to believe that our own clan, our own last name, is best. It's hard for all of us, especially the old people, to forget the old grudges. We are a tiny minority in America. If we don't think of ourselves as one people, then we are lost.

Adult ESL

Rhode Island is an educationally depressed State. Only seven states had average SAT test scores lower than Rhode Island. Forty-nine percent of all people 25 years or older have not graduated from high school. Only 15% of the population over 25 has graduated from college. A high school diploma is a document of considerable privilege in Rhode Island.

Waits of several months for ESL classes were not uncommon in 1981 and 1982 during the months of heavy arrivals, fortified by secondary migrants from other states. ESL staff were increased and by 1983 anyone who wanted English received it, either through an ORR-funded program or any of several agencies and schools offering ESL.

The average ESL length of study for a Hmong in Providence is 9-12 montns. Some studied longer. The ORR-funded program of regular ESL runs for six months, four hours a day. For those who work, the agency offers two hours of instruction in the early evening. By regulation, ESL is offered to primary wage earners, usually the heads of household in non-working hours. In no case is ESL offered as an alternative to employment. Despite these eligibility requirements, the ESL provider, by its own admission, has sufficient funding to offer ESL to every refugee who wants it no matter what their date of arrival in the country.

In May 1983, the eligibility requirements for admission into an ORR-funded program were tightened. Henceforth, refugees in Rhode Island who have been in the country for longer than 18 months are not eligible for an ORR-funded regular ESL program unless prior approval is obtained on a case-by-case basis. According to figures furnished by Project Personna, the regular ESL provider, 70 of the agency's last 100 students had been in the United States longer than 18 months.

Other ESL programs are available to refugees no matter how long they have been in the country. The Hmong-Lao Unity Association runs its own ESL evening school three nights a week. Seventy students are currently enrolled. The eight teachers are drawn from the ranks of the Hmong college students. Classes are taught in English by the college students who use their native language, as needed, for explanations. The school also employs several part-time American teachers who drill the students on their pronounciation. "Team teaching" uses the best of both pedigogical worlds--a native English speaker for pronounciation and native Hmong speakers, fluent in English, to explain the structure of English in language that students understand. The majority of students in the Hmong evening school are women. Nearly every age

group is represented. The school attracts students who learn at a slower pace than what is offered by the American-run ESL providers which is geared to heads of households.

Based on the first year of experience, the school designed three levels of proficiency in English. In order to pass Levels I and II the students must be able to hold a pen and write their name and address. They should know the days of the week, colors, shapes and know how to use American money for shopping. They should understand the meaning of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. The objectives for Levels III and IV include the ability to: read and write simple sentences; answer and ask oral questions; participate in a conversation; understand basic grammar, basic greetings and polite expressions; and understand decimals, fractions and percents in mathematics. The objective of Level V is to assist students to enter vocational training and prepare to take GED classes.

The Hmong Evening School has been in operation for two years. Currently, the school includes 25 students who are employed, 25 who are on public assistance and 20 who are housewives with children. Three students are over 60 years of age; three are between 50 and 60 years; 15 are between 40 and 50. At present, there is no basis for comparing the levels of achievement between the American versus the Hmong taught methods of instruction.

The Hmong adults have definite ideas about what makes a good ESL teacher. A 64-year-old Hmong man who has taken every available ESL class says the main problem with American teachers is their lack of preparation for the classroom. "They just grab any book or magazine or photocopy and try to make a lesson out of it." The old man said the Hmong way is different. "We need to have the confidence that our teacher really knows what he or she is doing." Another Hmong elder said, "The Americans change teachers too often.

For us it means a different voice, a different teaching idea. The Hmong like to learn but in an orderly, step-by-step way, with the same method each day." Another man said that he learned the most from a teacher who told him that the English language has high and low musical tones too; they're called accents and they tell the voice to go up and down like the Hmong tones. A woman said the Hmong drop out of school because they are not keeping up with the other students. "If my group is learning and I am not, then I am left behind. I feel sad. Then I get bored and stop coming to school. Maybe I had better stay home," the student says. Another elder said that eventually the Hmong will "catch the American sound," if they only stay in school. He made this analogy. In 1933, only six Hmong could read and write Laotian. By 1965, all of the Hmong men could read, write and speak Laotian. In 30 years, half of the Hmong population in Laos learned a new language without the benefit of schools, teachers, or formal instruction. If the Hmong accomplished this on their own in 30 years, the elder argued, even the older Hmong should be able to learn English with the help of the American teachers in half that time. Of course, few Hmong adults speak English in their homes. One head of household remarked, "Inside of our home, it is like Laos. The food we eat, the words we speak, our customs are more like Laos than America. It is only America when we go out."

Several Hmong bilingual heads of household reported a linguistic dilemma of growing proportions in their families. The children have not learned enough Hmong to follow the intricacies of their parents' conversation. At the same time, the children learn concepts and words in English that have no counterparts in the Hmong language. The result is a linguistic impasse. As a Hmong leader observed:

> Nobody in my family can say what they really want to say and have anyone else understand them. What can we talk about? The food? Some gossip? I translate so my wife and my children can understand each other.

IV

SIGNIFICANCE OF SITE

What do Hmong say is good about Providence? What do they say is bad? How does Providence measure up as a resettlement site? What is the future of the Hmong community in Rhode Island? What can be learned from Providence that has relevance elsewhere in the country?

By way of introduction, it must be said that few of the Hmong informants professed a deep and lasting attachment to Providence. About 60% of the Hmong community currently living in Providence came to the state directly from Thailand. For them, Providence was a dot on an unknown map, an unpronounceable place where a relative was living equally by chance. The Americans who work with the Hmong would no doubt like to think that their welcome has made the state an attractive place for a permanent Hmong community. Most Hmong said they didn't know the best place to live. One man said the Hmong should look for a state that has both jobs and a garden. "The old can work in the garden and the young in a factory." In a nutshell, this may be the best practical advice for a successful resettlement site. Another criteria heard for a resettlement site is that there needs to be enough jobs and housing for relatives to live in one place.

The attractive features about Providence include:

Inexpensive housing for either rental or purchase;

The large number of entry-level jobs that require minimal levels of English;

The presence of health insurance for many entry-level jobs;

Recognition of the Hmong community and access to funding by the state coordinator's office;

A fairly well organized mutual assistance association that is increasingly recognized in both the Hmong and American communities;

Proximity to the ocean for fishing and also to land for farming;

A growing reception to the presence of refugees in the workforce by employers;

A system of neighborhood health centers and hospitals who have hired Hmong as bilingual staff to improve the quality of care;

A welfare system that includes general public assistance for single people as well as families at rates comparable to AFDC; and

A city long accustomed to the presence of immigrants and refugee groups.

The undesirable aspects of Providence include:

A undercurrent of racial tension between Blacks and the Hmong;

A strict pattern of housing segregation that binds the Hmong to high crime neighborhoods; and

The great distance between Providence and the other large Hmong communities in the country such as St. Paul, Minnesota and Fresno, California, which creates a constant temptation to move.

Crime is a preoccupation of many Hmong families, yet other Hmong families say they have not been bothered. No statistics are available on incidences of crime. At the group meetings, however, crime provoked the loudest storm of replies. Thirteen out of 26 households said their car windows have been broken by intruders. Two out of 26 said they have been robbed. Some said they are afraid to leave their homes unattended. The subject of crime always brings up a great variety of questions, challenges and anger. Hmong want to know why the police are so impotent, why suspected criminals have rights and why the police don't take more steps to protect their neighborhoods. At one meeting, a young leader asked a police major, "What are the rules for murder in this country?"

Self-defense and its limitations is a topic of continual interest. Under the guise of a hunter safety course, over 100 Hmong heads of household obtained a hunting license. A large number of these families purchased guns. Some will admit to having no interest in hunting. Some leaders worry about the implications of so many armed families in the tightly packed neighborhoods of Providence on a humid summer evening. Other leaders say that it's time that other groups in Providence learn that the Hmong are not going to stand by and watch their families and property become victims of theft and vandalism.

One reason for the relative high incidence of crime against the Hmong is that the refugees do not readily understand the steps they should take to protect their property. The refugee program has hired a housing specialist who has held classes in how to install your own home burglar alarm. Cars, especially new ones, must have alarm systems. If more refugees learned to use the banking system, there would be less cash at home for a potential robber. The refugees unintentionally invite robbers by not safeguarding their possessions.

Another strategy is available in Providence for combating crime. The Office of Refugee Resettlement has contracted to the four MAA groups, including the Hmong, a 24-hour emergency interpreter system. This enables a non-English speaking Hmong to report a crime. He or she calls a 24-hour number and says "Hmong." An English operator then conferences the caller with a bilingual Hmong interpreter. In a few minutes the caller is speaking to the interpreter who can then dial the police department to report a crime in progress. The police also have this number and any time they need an interpreter they also call the 24-hour emergency number.

Much of the crime problem would be solved had the the resettlement agencies located the refugees in other safer, working class neighborhoods. Instead, Hmong and other Southeast Asians were resettled in apartments closest to the offices of the affiliates of the International Institute and Catholic Social Services. These neighborhoods also happen to have the highest crime rates of any location in the entire state. The result was predictable. Refugees were victimized as their numbers grew.

Very little has been done to promote racial understanding between the Hmong and the other minority groups in their neighborhoods. Few Hmong know that the Whites have historically excluded the Blacks from achieving political power in America just as the Ethnic Lao once excluded the Hmong and other highland minorities from participation in Laotian society. Likewise, the Black community has no conception of the parallels between Afro-Americans and the Hmong. As minority people, the Blacks and the Hmong have commonalities which have never been explored. Although dozens of churches are actively involved with the Hmong, few connections have been made with the Black clergy to explore possible avenues of community education in order to challenge the racial stereotypes. For the most part, refugee resettlement remains the exclusive concern of White middle class Americans who resettle Asians in Black neighborhoods without consulting the Black leadership for its endorsement and/or participation.

The interviews revealed that Rhode Island's resettlement program is characterized by a strong state coordinator who has cajoled the VOLAGs and service providers into working together, sharing information, making referrals and moving a refugee through the services until he or she is fully employed. A case management system was organized in 1981, which changed the all-purpose voluntary agencies into guides who ensure that refugees get the services they

need by making appointments with specialized employment and ESL agencies. Although most agencies agreed that the services were better organized than in the past, most resented the narrowing of their functions and the requirements of belonging to a system as opposed to their self-appointed roles as free agents in the resettlement game. Some look back wistfully on the days before Rhode Island had a resettlement coordinator (the years 1976-80) when the state essentially handed funds over to the agenices without regard to outcome, oversight or coordination.

The Rhode Island Office of Refugee Resettlement has actively promoted the Hmong mutual assistance association in the belief that when the funding dries up and the Americans "withdraw," as it were, the Hmong will have developed a voice and a presence in the city political system. The state coordinator has encouraged Hmong leaders to link up with other institutions in the community, such as schools, hospitals, health centers, neighborhood associations and the like. The state coordinator's concern is that the special short-term funding will not be used to establish a parallel system of services. Insofar as possible, the resources of the refugee program should be used to expand the agendas of the existing city and private agencies to include the Hmong as one part of their constituency. He encourages Hmong leaders to serve on the boards of other groups.

Providence has only one Hmong MAA, the Hmong-Lao Unity Association, an incorporated, tax exempt community association. At present, the Hmong hold nine contracts by and between the State for: Executive Director; Indochinese Garden Project; Emergency Interpreter Project (2 contracts); ESL Evening School; Orientation Project; Day Care Trainee; MAA Special Jobs Coordinator; and MAA Health Coordinator for a total amount of $80,000. Rather than write one contract for the entire program, the State has opted for separate

contracts for each project. In this manner, the MAA Board can clearly see how the money is being spent on each project. If a project sours, then it can be eliminated without affecting the others. After two years of contracting with the Hmong, the state coordinator believes the Hmong are one of the most responsible groups to have contracted with the State. "The Hmong MAA has spent its funds correctly and has properly accounted for all expenditures," said the state coordinator.

Because the State contracts to all agencies in the resettlement program on a reimbursable basis, almost every agency runs into cash flow difficulties due to the six-week delay between the day the contract is signed and the days the State can honor its vendors. When the Hmong MAA recently ran into this State-created cash shortage they overcame it in a novel manner. Fifteen members of the MAA, including board members, clan leaders and staff, voluntarily loaned a total of $6,400 at no interest to the Association for six months. Those who loaned their money came from seven clan groups in Providence, evidence that it is possible for the MAA to transcend the interests of a single group. By relying on their internal resources, the MAA overcame their cash shortage without incurring any of the interest charges that an American agency would face.

In other ways, the Hmong have increasingly made their presence known. By 1984, 53 Hmong families had purchased their own homes, a remarkable achievement given the daunting prospect of a 20-year mortgage. Overall, nearly 100 Southeast Asians in Providence own their homes. This number is expected to climb with lower interest rates. An effort is underway to organize a Southeast Asian Homeowners Association. The Hmong and other Southeast Asians are helping to rebuild two of the city's most troubled neighborhoods. A city bank recently made it known that not one of its

Southeast Asian customers has yet defaulted on a car loan or missed a month's mortgage payment. Moreover, the bank reported that the Hmong and other Southeast Asians save at a higher rate than the average American, a fact not lost on the city bankers, eager to locate a vein of new customers. The Hmong have a growing reputation as valued workers, as law abiding citizens, and as parents who generally value education. The Hmong have an excellent record with the law.

Everyone hopes these trends will continue. The employment picture should improve with the decreased admission of refugees to Rhode Island. In FY 83, the four voluntary agencies operating in Rhode Island brought only 59 families for a total of 251 additional refugees; not all of whom were Southeast Asians. Two years ago, the State received this number in a single month. The stable population will ensure that the State's resources are directed to the remaining individuals on cash assistance. Within the next two years, the state coordinator expects the Hmong in Rhode Island to reduce their dependency rate below the average for U.S. citizens.